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HOT, HUMID CONDITIONS CREATE POTENTIAL HEALTH CONCERNS

INDIANAPOLIS—In preparation for dangerously high heat indexes throughout the week, the Marion County Public Health Department, the City of Indianapolis, the Indianapolis Division of Homeland Security and other community organizations are implementing the city's Extreme Temperature Contingency Plan. This plan allows the health department to request expanded operating hours from community centers for cooling locations and coordinate multiple community agencies to assist those needing access to cooled locations and other heat-related needs.

"The City of Indianapolis is collaborating with agencies and partners across our community to ensure the public has access to cooling sites for relief from the heat," said Mayor Greg Ballard. "I encourage everyone to check in with elderly neighbors and loved ones who may be susceptible to the extreme conditions."

One immediate response will be activation of a call center for Marion County residents to call with general non-emergency heat-related questions and referral to community cooling sites. The public is encouraged to call (317) 221-2415 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

"The Marion County Public Health Department is warning local residents to take the heat wave seriously and understand the significant heat-related illnesses such conditions can quickly create," said Virginia A. Caine, M.D., director, Marion County Public Health Department.

The combination of temperatures above 90 degrees and humidity above 30 percent create the heat index. A heat index of 105 degrees is considered the level where many people begin to experience extreme discomfort or physical stress.

Elderly people, infants, chronically ill, overweight people and persons on certain medications are most susceptible to heat-related illness. Those with cardiac or pulmonary problems also are at higher risk in this type of weather. The threat to senior citizens is heightened because they generally do not sweat as efficiently as younger people, thus making it more difficult to adjust to high heat and humidity. Those age three and under also are more likely to experience heat-related illness. Never leave infants, children or pets in parked cars under any circumstances.

Symptoms of heat stress include dizziness, nausea or vomiting, rapid heartbeat, headaches, weakness, cramps, heavy sweating or hot, dry skin, and changes in mental health.

“Heat illnesses can be life threatening,” said Dr. Caine. “If a person appears to be in trouble, immediate emergency medical care should be obtained by calling 9-1-1.”

While air conditioning is the most ideal solution to the heat, many people live or work in situations where it is not available.

Fans alone do not offer appropriate cooling to provide for a healthy situation. When the temperature is in the high 90s fans will not prevent heat-related illness. People who do not have air conditioning are encouraged to seek out air-conditioned environments like those found in cooling centers, public libraries and shopping malls.

The guidelines for keeping safe in extremely hot weather are relatively simple, and while they may be inconvenient, they are important to follow.

Reduce heat-related health risks by:

- Drinking plenty of cool water with ice.
- Avoiding prolonged exposure to high temperature.
- Attempting to get in air conditioning, even for brief periods. If you do not have air conditioning, move to a location that is air-conditioned.
- Cooling down with cool baths or showers.
- Wearing loose-fitting clothing.
- Slowing down from your normal pace.
- Avoiding alcohol.
- Drawing shades, blinds and curtains in rooms exposed to direct sunlight.

The health department is recommending that all outdoor activity be curtailed during this dangerous heat wave.

Avoiding strenuous activity including working outdoors for prolonged periods of time in direct sunlight, working on surfaces like asphalt and concrete, athletic practices and other event preparation like high school band practices is strongly recommended. Coaches and band instructors should watch the weather and adjust as needed to minimize any heat-related illness and injury.

Animal owners are advised to provide adequate shelter, food and water to their animals during the extreme heat. Indianapolis Animal Care and Control offers a free program where they will pick up and take care of an animal whose owner needs to move from their home during the heat emergency. Animal Care and Control will take care of the animal until the owner returns home. The owner is responsible for picking up their pet.

The health department will continue to provide updated information concerning the heat wave through the local media and the health department web site at www.mchd.com.

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